

Alejandro N. Mayorkas
Director, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

Remarks to:
Immigration & American Competitiveness: The
Challenge Ahead
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If we were to have a genealogist identify for us the family ancestry of the people in this room, we would have in our hands a tangible and powerful reminder that our country is a nation of immigrants and a beacon of hope and opportunity. Let those of us who will hold a microphone today serve as but a few examples.

More than sixty years ago, the grandson of immigrants was born in the Brighton neighborhood of Boston. With talent and through education and hard work, he rose to become the architect of a media empire and the 108th Mayor of New York city.

The family origins of our distinguished panelists are spread throughout the world, and I am a proud American who came to this country as a refugee from Cuba.

Our discussion today, focusing on immigration, American competitiveness, and the challenge ahead, is part of the National Chamber Foundation's provocative business horizon series. A horizon is the range of one's perceptions, and it is important that we appreciate what we have when we endeavor to define what could be.

We all acknowledge the need to reform our immigration system to fully realize the contributions that immigrants can make to the growth and prosperity of our nation's economy. We well understand the obstacles our current laws present when we seek to attract and retain a greater share of talent in a world of ever-increasing competition from abroad.

At the same time, however, let us not discount the magnet that America remains. Each year, we at U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services handle six to seven million applications for a wide array of immigration benefits. We grant citizenship to 6- to 700,000 people annually, and this year again, the statutory maximum number of employment-based visas – 140,000 – was met. Immigrant-founded, publicly-traded U.S. companies employ approximately 220,000 people in this country and more than 400,000 people worldwide. The market capitalization of these companies exceeds 500 billion dollars.

With an immigration system admittedly in need of repair, America still continues to provide boundless and unparalleled opportunity. Our immediate charge at USCIS is to realize our existing laws' full potential to support the business of American business, so that we can out-innovate and out-compete in a global economy.

Before I touch upon our challenges and endeavor to define our horizon, I would like to thank the Chamber and the U.S. Forum for Policy Innovation for hosting this exceptional series and for inviting me here today. Thank you Mayor Bloomberg and our distinguished panelists for joining us shortly; your thoughts and vision help frame our future actions.

Though we at USCIS approve on average more than 80% of the business immigration applications we adjudicate, we receive criticism for the path we have paved for businesses and businesspeople to obtain the benefits for which they are eligible: at times the path can be unduly narrow or too slow, and it is not overseen with the agility that the dynamism of the business world requires.

In response, I share with colleagues my view that we are not to shrink from this criticism, but we must instead work hard to ensure that we do not deserve it.

We are working hard. Our work is underway in three main channels of progress: policy, process, and people. We are reviewing and revising our policies to ensure that the legislature's intent and the law's objectives are fully realized. We are reengineering our adjudication processes to yield greater efficiency. And, we are providing the human capital support and training that our current adjudication teams deserve.

A few current examples are illustrative:

- In early August we clarified our policies to reflect the availability of the H-1B visa and the EB-2 national interest waiver to foreign-born entrepreneurs, and we are providing the needed training complement;

- We are expanding accelerated, or premium, processing to immigrant petitions for certain multinational executives and managers;
- In mid October, we are providing new training to our adjudicators in the review of L-1B petitions, the petitions that American businesses file to transfer, intracompany, their executives from an international office to one here in the United States;
- We have made significant changes in the way in which we adjudicate cases in the immigrant investor, or EB-5, program – a program that is designed to create jobs in America. We have retained business analysts to support our adjudicators and received more than 75 applications for additional economists; we will be hiring corporate expertise, issuing new policy guidance in the next few weeks, and currently we have outstanding a targeted request for proposal to reengineer

our business process from beginning to end. The EB-5's full allotment of 10,000 investor visas has never been reached; in 2008, just over twelve hundred were issued. But in the past three years the volume has tripled, and the potential remains great.

- Across all business lines, we will be hiring people with business experience and harnessing the expertise of business leaders from both the public and private sectors to inform our policy development and our training, so that we can more ably address the realities and needs of the business community we serve.
- We received thoughtful and creative responses to our request for information as to how we can reinvent our entire customer service system, which is currently based on a call-center model. We will be issuing a formal request for

proposal shortly. We must be able to provide case information to businesses that need it on a real-time basis.

We have challenges before us, and each challenge presents an opportunity to change and improve in the service of one of our immigration system's overarching goals: our nation's economic prosperity. The engine of that prosperity is the American business community, a community that attracts the best and the brightest from around the world to invest their talents, skills, and ideas to grow this nation's economy and create American jobs. Immigrants fuel our growth not just today and the day after; immigration is an investment in our nation's long-term future. Who knows which immigrant will become our next great innovator, or which immigrant's grandson or granddaughter will build a new media empire and become the mayor of one of our greatest cities.

In the shadow of the need for legislative reform of our immigration system, there is a great deal that can be done to realize the current system's full potential. By doing so, we advance America's growth and prosperity and brighten its future. With a brighter future, shadows dissipate, and new horizons are defined.

Thank you.